

supporting student participation

Connect

Number 83: October 1993

THIS MONTH'S QUIZ QUESTION:

Student participation is:

- ☐ a disposable fad of the seventies?
- ☐ alive and well, but living somewhere else?
- ☐ underground and asleep?
- ☐ happening in my classroom?
- ☐ puzzled and dispossessed?

Answer?See article page 3

- Renewable Energy Science: Goroke
- Technology for Real: Eumemmerring
- Storybooks with a Difference: Golden Square
- Empowering Students to deal with Harassment
- Teaching Adolescents rather than Subjects
- Teacher Writing and Reflection
- Children's Rights

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12 Brooke Street
Northcote 3070
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\$4.00

Print Post Approved
PP 340646/0008

ISSN 0158-4995

CONNECT

Number 83

October 1993

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CONNECT

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Printed by **Graymac Printers**,
126 Hoddle Street, Abbotsford 3067.

COVER

Everyone loves self-marking quizzes!
Inspired by Allen Jones' article - page 3.
How did you score?

This Issue

These are difficult times in Victoria - school closures and mergers; new staffing formulae; changes to School Councils. Where are the student voices?

Allen Jones' article tackles some of these difficult issues. He points to local actions taken by students (not widely reported), and measures at some schools to bring students into local decision making. In other areas, *Connect* is aware of SRCs and ex-School Council student representatives who have written to the Minister in protest at their exclusion from the new structures.

How far we have gone (backwards) from the approaches summarised in the *Age* headlines of 29-30 October, 1987: 'Give children a say in how schools are run, says top-level report' and 'Encourage students to have their say' (Editorial Opinion)! (See *Connect* 48.)

And lest one hears: 'Nothing to do with students', David Schapper reminisces about actions and responses from 1969.

Yet exciting programs continue to operate under difficulties in schools. This issue presents three more reports of school projects supported by the **Small Change Foundation**.

Birsin Reynolds also shares information about a student-based approach to harassment at one school. The ideas contained here are adaptable to all levels: I talked with JSC students from one Melbourne primary school last week, who were very interested to consider training as mediators - to intervene and prevent schoolyard fights.

Why write about these?

Bob Jones and Marylyn Wentworth shared important reflections in a recent issue of *Hands On* (from the **Foxfire** Fund in the USA). Don't wait for a project to be 'finished'! Writing about the process is more illuminating (and interesting) - to tell others about the dilemmas and joys along the way, to communicate the excitement, to share the puzzlement, to inspire and reassure.

Go thou and do likewise!?!

Next Issue

The next issue of **Connect** is due in December, with copy due by the end of November please! Read about how junior secondary students operate annual science shows in Werribee for primary school students - and other articles are promised on topics as diverse as a Music Garden, and research on the Northcote Tip.

We'd also like to hear from you. Don't wait to be asked to write - your experience of student participation is valuable, and could be read by interested people all over Australia.

Roger Holdsworth

STUDENTS:

THE DISPOSSESSED IN THE NEW POWER RELATIONS IN VICTORIAN STATE SCHOOLS

This article was originally going to contain a historical survey of student participation in the Victorian state education system. The 1980s attracted my interest because it was a period of remarkable growth and redefining of student participation. Undoubtedly, the energy for innovation came from the election of the Cain Labor government in Victoria (1982) and the increasingly proactive role of the Federal government through programs such as the Transition Education Advisory Committee (TEAC) and Participation and Equity Program (PEP).

Roger Holdsworth (1993, pp. 86-95) in an article for the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) titled '*Student Participation: a decade of unfinished business*', provides an excellent summary of the range and the nature of student participation during that decade. Furthermore, Holdsworth suggests that the current 'educational dialogue' about proper management strategies and the need to be cost effective in the use of educational resources have basically changed the way student participation is defined and talked about. It is this last point that is the main focus of this article.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION DURING THE 1980'S IN ONE VICTORIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

At the start of the 1980s, like numerous schools across Victoria, Wendouree High Technical School (now called Wendouree Secondary College) found itself having to contend with the changes introduced by the *Ministerial Papers 1-6*, TEAC, PEP and the Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP). Adding to these external factors were internal forces of change generated by the fact that WSC was only in its fifth

year of operation in 1982. Still, 1982 proved to be a conspicuous year for the school because it marked an internal structural change that still exists today: the division of the school into four sub-schools. In concert with the external changes, it was this structural change that helped to develop and create the school's response to student participation. In some ways the conjunction of the various forces produced a response that made the school somewhat different to other secondary schools in Ballarat.

During 1982-3 many schools held elections so their students could choose student representatives for the newly structured School Councils - in some cases, schools co-opted students rather than elected them. This legitimisation of student participation in law served to reinforce student activities that had already begun at WSC under the banner of TEAC. Students had places on the Curriculum Committee, and were helping to administer the Music Faculty through the Music Committee and were running Resource Allocation Groups (RAG). Individuals like the Music teacher, the Community Education Officer (CEO), the Pupil Welfare Officer and other interested teachers had nurtured this ad hoc approach to student participation. The ad hoc approach produced nothing like the traditional Student Representative Council (SRC) when it came to formal student governance at WSC. It took the appearance of the sub-schools, the formalisation of student participation on the School Council and the arrival of the TEAC/PEP funded Curriculum Project Team (CPT) to produce a coherent student owned structure.

The election of student representatives for the School Council and the Curriculum Committee became the responsibility of the sub-schools. Yet there were no means by which the students could effectively communicate with their constituents. Demand arose from the students for the Sub-Schools (Units) to have their own formalised student government group. Each year level wanted representation on the student government group. Subsequently, each sub-school held elections.

In one sub-school the representatives on the Unit Student Government Group felt that meetings at lunchtimes were inappropriate given the growing

demands on them to participate in the various sub-committees of the School Council, the CPT, to take part in Community In-service days and so on. The students responded by developing and submitting to their Unit a proposal for a Student Government module. The staff agreed to support the proposal and it went to the Curriculum Committee for ratification. Consequently, the module became part of school's curriculum.

So successful did the module (subject) proved to be that by 1984 all the junior Units (7 - 10) were running Student Government. To enhance its legitimacy as part of the curriculum the module became the responsibility of the Social Science faculty. Furthermore, as the students had requested that a teacher from each Unit be involved with their respective Student Government the module became recognised as part of a teaching allotment. Interestingly, enough teachers at first were volunteers and willing participants in the process. The teachers also came from different faculties but after some years this changed and the module became the sole responsibility of Social Education teachers.

The CPT also provided another impetus for student participation as the CPT was the research team for the Curriculum Committee. A significant decision taken by the staff appointed to this team was the inclusion of parent and student representatives from the Units. For the students this meant a pro-active role in the investigation, evaluation and implementation of curriculum decisions across the entire school. Students in this team helped to devise research strategies, identify issues and feed information back to and from the students in Student Government. The students in this team planned, organised, ran and evaluated what became known as student forums but could have been equally labelled student professional development workshops.

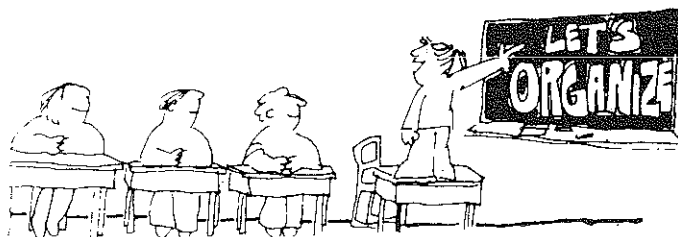
Out of the CPT sprung another group called Student Participation and Accreditation Group (SPAG). SPAG consisted of two representatives from each of the Junior Unit Student Governments, the School Council student representatives, the Regional Board student representative, co-opted students as issues or activities demanded and two staff members. The staff members (the CEO and myself as the CPT representative) provided a resource or sounding board for the students, and we did not have any vote when it came to making decisions.

SPAG became a sounding board for whole school student issues and pressure group that worked to ensure the administration accredited all extra-curricula activities completed by students on their school reports. For example, teachers recorded the sporting events, camps, student forums, CPT activities, and so on completed by students. The students argued their case so-well for 'student accreditation' that the school administration responded by creating a School Responsibility Position (SRP) for student accreditation. To some

students this was only a partial success because they believed that a student group was capable of doing the job rather than have a teacher take it up. SPAG also was able to gain funds from DSP for numerous projects devised by students and had to be responsible for running a budget and so on. In many ways SPAG became a pseudo SRC as it became the main contact point for the junior student governments, the student school councillors, the student regional board representative and other school SRCs through the Ballarat Student Network (BSN).

Personnel changes in the school - staff, principal and deputy principal - along with the commitment and interest of students produced an ebb and flow in the quality and intensity of student participation in the school. By 1987 student participation probably reached its zenith at WSC. After this date, a traditional SRC replaced SPAG. Student Government lapsed into a module that increasingly catered for students who wanted to escape the 'academic approach' of the formal classroom or those that had no other choice because of the progressive erosion of electives caused by the adoption of a core and then a comprehensive curriculum. Importantly, the decline seemed to coincide with the demise of PEP and the position of CEO.

It's hard to convey what went on in a period spanning some ten years. Yet by 1993, 'student participation' was limited to an SRC that pursued the traditional pursuits of uniform, helping to organise and run the school's Victorian Off-Road Outdoor Expo and so on. This year some members of the SRC have tried to rejuvenate the BSN. They attempted to improve the quality of communication and joint actions of Ballarat schools' SRCs - something that the issues of quality provision will surely test. Student Government divided into two horizontal classes covering all the junior Units at Year 10 and Year 9, student representation on the School Council and its sub-committees like the Curriculum Committee and the Equal Opportunity committee. In many ways 'student participation' in student own organisations, formal school decision-making structures and curriculum decision-making was in need of review and revitalisation. It was in this environment that some efforts began in 1993 to resurrect a Unit student newsletter, to evaluate the effectiveness of Student Government and to involve more students on the School Council and Curriculum committee. Yet this process of revitalisation suffered a blow with the change to the composition of School Councils.



THE NEW POLICIES: THE REWRITING OF ROLES

The election of the Liberal-National Coalition State government in October 1992 has seen a massive acceleration in the rationalisation of education expenditure. The sacking of school cleaners and their replacement by contract cleaners, the cuts to staffing, the reduction in the size of the central and regional bureaucracies, the forced closure of fifty-five schools, the Schools of the Future (SOTF) program and the Quality Provision program have clearly demonstrated the change in government priorities regarding spending on education. The government made all Victorians aware of its spending priorities by the publication of the so-called 'independent' auditor's report on the state of Victoria's finances. The home delivered glossy brochure showed a state supposedly in a financial mess. Hence the government hoped that everyone would understand why reduced expenditure on education, health and so on was necessary. It is in this environment of reduced expenditure and increased efficiencies from current resources that a redefinition of student participation has occurred. Significantly, in redefining student participation, it has been students that have lost the most in participation in the formal decision making structures of Victorian state schools. The *Schools of the Future Preliminary Paper* (DSE, 1993) provides a sign of this change.

SCHOOLS OF THE FUTURE AND SCHOOL COUNCILS

An examination of the SOTF *Preliminary Paper* reveals a document that is heavy in defining structures and the functions of the various elements of that structure. While it claims to be about the devolution of power to the local school, it is also evident that it is a restricted form of devolution. The School Charter, the School Review Office (SRO), the Board of Studies (an interesting acronym that spells BOS), staffing and global funding are mechanisms that still tie schools to the central system. Essentially, the document is about a new management structure. In providing data about the new structure, some redefinition of concepts such as equity, social justice, quality education, community, school council, principal, teacher and student are very much to the fore. For example, over the last ten years, the geographic definition of the school community was the school's neighbourhood; that community consisted of three significant players in the education process: the students, parents and teachers. Now there is a broader view of what constitutes the school community; it includes not only the three original partners but the local community (which doesn't have to be the school's neighbourhood) and the wider Victorian community (DSE, 1993, p. 17). Yet, for the students, the significance of the definition rests in its use in the SOTF pilot project.

The School Council has been the decision-making body in which students have had a legally constituted part. Unquestionably, it had been the body where the three partners of the school community came together to make decisions about the school in terms of the community's needs and wants. The introduction of the SOTF program heralded a change, now in place, to the make-up of the School Council. In the *Preliminary Paper* the opening sentence describing the School Council stated that 'parents and other members of the school community will play a more significant role in decision-making in Schools of the Future (DSE, 1993, p. 9). Immediately, the question needs to be asked about who the other members of the school community are. The answer rests in the application of the broader definition of community discussed above. It appears that these people will have to come from the wider community. The *Preliminary Paper* reinforces this idea when it states that the School Council has the power to 'co-opt members of the community with special expertise' (p. 9). Just who will be the people with expertise co-opted onto School Councils?

Nowhere does the word 'student' appear in this section. So it appears that the only way students will get onto a School Council is if they have some relevant expertise or the School Council decides to take a policy decision to include students. It is also unlikely that many School Councils will co-opt students when there is limit to the overall number of co-opted Councillors. SOTF clearly writes the students out of the formal decision-making body.

It would be interesting to speculate on the underlying assumptions here about the type of contributions that students can make to the decision-making process. It is hard to see that students had 'captured the system' as the Minister for Education, Don Hayward sees as his justification for changing the 'culture of education' in Victoria (Hayward, ACPPV, 1992, p.1). In the SOTF literature no group suffers the curt dismissal from School Councils like the students. Even DSE employees like teachers don't suffer this humiliation - though there is a curtailment of their influence by the reduction in the number allowed on the School Council. Again the answer must rest with how the DSE or, what is more important, how those charged with construction of the Liberal-National Party's education policy viewed or views the type and quality of contributions that students can make. Once you remove the students as a legal entity from the School Council, you must be saying that students are incapable of making decisions or participating effectively in the creation of the School Charter or the Code of Conduct - something in which students would seem to have a vested interest.

Obviously, the policy-makers' decision to exclude students from School Councils was based on numerous assumptions about what students are not capable of doing. For example, students might be seen as being incapable of adhering to concepts like

collective responsibility and so on. Whatever assumptions the policy makers had about students, no-one can deny that a new definition of what students can or cannot do is being used. Perhaps it is the result of redefining students as clients or consumers. However, we know that if an enterprise produces an object that the consumers don't want, then the enterprise heads down the road of bankruptcy. It is always a tenuous ploy to use an analogy, but if the clients (students) don't get what they want, what will happen to the Schools of the Future?

QUALITY PROVISION TASK FORCES

The creation of the Quality Task-forces has been, to say the least, controversial. According to Hayward the aim of the Quality Provision Task Group process is to:

... ensure that all students in Victorian schools are able to maximise their potential ... (and)
... have access to the highest quality of educational opportunities

(*A Quality Provision Framework for Victorian Schools*, DSE, 1993, p. 2)

The general thrust of the provision audit is basically to improve the breadth and depth of curriculum choice and facilities for all Victorian students in State schools. Yet, as the Director of School Education, Geoff Spring admitted, the quality has to be provided against a background of 'high and unsustainable cost of maintaining our present school system' (DSE, 1993, p. 2). Hence, the 'quality provision' process is about re-structuring the present system with the added aim of reducing cost for the government.

As the 'quality provision' process is supposedly about improving the quality of education for students, it would seem that students and school communities have a vested interest in the decisions to be made by the various Regional Quality Provision Task-forces. Even Hayward and Spring recognise the need to involve the 'school communities' in the Task Force process (DSE, 1993, p. 2).

I already noted how SOTF used a new definition of school community; what definition are they using here? Obviously, it will vary from place to place as the Task-forces apply the measurement criteria to whether a school is providing a 'quality curriculum'. For example, in a provincial city like Ballarat, school neighbourhood communities are only involved in providing representatives to a Secondary School Task Group that covers the wider community of Greater Ballarat, whereas the Primary School Task-forces within the city are divided into smaller neighbourhood groups. This inconsistency in applying the definition of community only serves to heighten tensions and insecurity for those concerned, because the boundaries of the playing field are always being shifted by the administrators of the game as it is in progress. It also tends to suggest that by applying the wider definition there is a tendency to ignore the

historical and cultural relationships of the local school community - a community from which the students are drawn.

Of course, the other aspect of the community definition being used with the Quality Provision Task-forces is the one that excludes students. Before the changes to the School Council it was possible for a student to be selected as a school's representative on the Task Group. Now, that is an impossibility.

Given that the recommendations of the Task-forces and Hayward's decision are going to affect the immediate future of all students, what have schools done to involve them in the process? For example, just ask yourself whether you know of any school that elected students to their local Task Group. I suspect it will be difficult to find any.

However, that doesn't exclude School Councils or school communities from including students in the process. It should be the right of the 'client' to know exactly what is going on and what all the options are for their futures. It doesn't matter what governments, directors of education, education bureaucrats (educrats), principals, task group leaders, teachers or parents say, no-one can escape the conclusion that any change will affect the students. If the school communities don't take the students into their confidence or involve them in the process it is possible that the students will take independent actions. Nevertheless, even involving students in the process must be done with the understanding that the wishes of the clients (patients) should not be ignored.

For example, in the Central Victorian city of Maryborough, students from the two secondary schools took what amounted to industrial action by walking out of their classes to hold a mass rally about a perceived injustice on the part of the Task Group. Apparently, the Task Group, after consulting students about whether the two schools should amalgamate, went against the wishes of the students who wanted to maintain two 'stand alone' Year 7 to 12 schools (*The Courier*, August 17, 1993, p. 3; *VSTA News* Sept 2 1993, p. 2). Another example occurred when Year 9 students at Ballarat High School just walked out of their classes because they took exception to a tentative Task Group recommendation that the school should become a senior college (*The Courier*, 2 September 1993, p. 1).

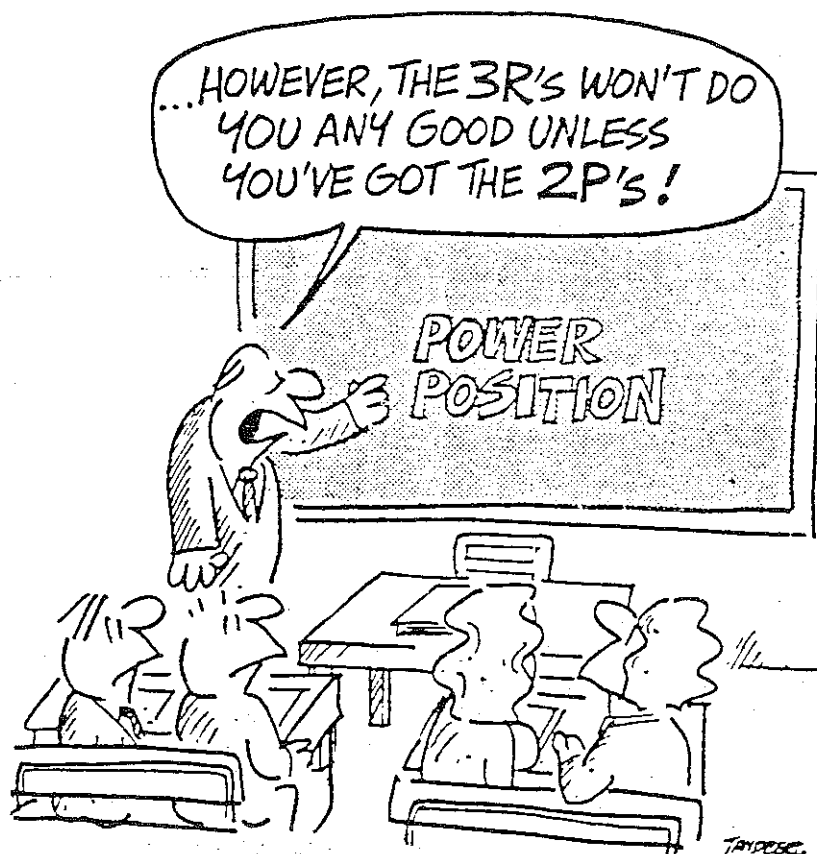
Whatever the outcomes of the Task Group's recommendation, students will be dislocated, fearful and unsure about the future. Undoubtedly, they will want to retain their school because of the security and identity they have tied to it. If schools leave students out of the process they run the risk that any rumour or ill-conceived decision will dislocate and alienate many students. By not taking the students formally into the process, the DSE have ignored the results of a decade that saw students as an integral part of the school community. In some ways the DSE, the Task-forces and schools have sown the seeds of discontent.

Indeed, schools may be confronted by a situation like the one documented by parents from Brunswick that showed a loss of students from the system since the forced closure of schools in 1992. Similarly, the closure of Ardoch-Windsor Secondary College, a school that catered for 'homeless kids', saw a marked rejection of the new arrangements by students from this former school. Grant McMurdo, Assistant Secretary of the Victorian Secondary Teachers' Association (VSTA) claimed there was a 1700 secondary student shortfall between planned enrolments against actual enrolments in the DSE's Western Region: a fact which McMurdo says has nothing to do with high youth unemployment, enrolments in private schools or students moving to other states and all to do with the policies of the Kennett government (VSTA News, June 17, 1993, p. 5). The lesson is there for all to see: a failure to take students into the process so that they can own it, will result in discontent and rejection of schooling.

ONE SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO CHANGES IN SCHOOL COUNCILS AND QUALITY PROVISION

At WSC the newly restructured School Council confronted the issue of student representation and participation. The School Council responded by deciding to co-opt two students. The action of the School Council reflects the positive contributions that student representatives had made to the deliberations and decisions of that body in the last decade. By taking this courageous decision, the Council has only the power to co-opt one more member. Of course, a future School Council could reverse this decision. Dependence on the good wishes of the School Council is not a guarantee of student representation. The only way to guarantee student representation is by law - something that is unlikely to happen in the immediate future.

Reducing the opportunities for student participation on the School Council doesn't necessarily mean the end of student influence. For example, the WSC SRC has tried to revitalise the BSN. If the strengthening of the BSN occurs, students will be able to use it as a platform for expressing and solving problems common to students across the Ballarat schools. The WSC SRC is also able to poll the students about their reactions to the proposed changes caused by the Quality Provision task group to the structure of schools. By getting the SRC to take a proactive role, the students should increase their potential to input into the school decision-making process. Luckily, at WSC the students still have that direct link with the School Council.



The quality provision process is a traumatic experience for the students at WSC. In talking to some students at WSC, it is obvious they are unsure of the future. Some students dislike the idea of change. These students see the school as a place of security and a place in which they have invested parts of their identity and self-esteem. For these students the answer for quality provision is to leave the school as it is, whereas the idea of having junior and senior secondary colleges received enthusiastic support from other students at WSC. Clearly, students, like everyone else, have their views about the process and what are or are not acceptable outcomes. Whatever the differing opinions of the students, one thing united all groups - the need to know what's going on.

The WSC administration, influenced by the student walk-out in Maryborough or not, took steps to formally involve students in the quality provision process. This first step involved using Contact Group (form) teachers to discuss the issue during Contact Group meeting time. Many Contact Group teachers allowed the students to use their knowledge to develop questions or to express their fears and concerns. Students with specific fears or questions could also seek answers from the school administration, after school, if they wished. This formal mechanism gave the students a way of dispelling rumours or gaining facts about the possible future options for the school. Students, though not in great numbers, started to attend the public meetings and to have their voice heard. This was a recognition of the need to provide the students with the facts rather than let rumours circulate. Nevertheless, the administration took further steps

to 'head off' any student action that they or the school community believed to be unacceptable. The further steps involved teachers being told not to endorse actions of students at other schools and to hold special student Unit meetings to head off any likely action.

Considering that students gained access to the administration and the facts about the options, student disquiet was still evident. The eventual 'walk out' of WSC students indicates the extent of their dissatisfaction.

The student protest occurred after special meetings and it happened on a day when it was pouring with rain. Granted that some students did it for a lark, the majority of the students clearly demonstrated a commitment to current schooling arrangements. Indeed, one student had to act against the publicly expressed opposition of his parents (*The Courier*, September 9, 1993, p. 3). The largest proportion of the student protesters came from Years 8, 9 and 10. This is not surprising when you realise that change affects Year 8 to 10 students in many ways. These students have a commitment to the school because their identity, friendship groups, school system and politics knowledge, and community networks revolve around the school.

Student attachment to their schools is like the way small rural communities see schools as the focus of their communities - hence, their resistance to a process that threatens the very existence of some communities. Therefore, I am not surprised to see students, across the state, taking action to vent their frustration and fear of the unknown. After completing the 'walk out' protest, many students returned with the idea of carrying their protest further by writing letters to the local press and politicians. Others took the opportunity to attend an education committee meeting to express their concerns and to have an input into the school's preferred option. And this is where this article leaves the process at WSC.

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN ?

For many students, the need to rationalise the use of education resources has nothing to do with the provision of quality education. It is always surprising to see what sorts of conditions students will put up with as long as they have a sense of belonging, and committed and skilled teachers. Students are not ignorant of what goes on in their schools. They are aware of the changes to programs caused by economic decisions to reduce the education budget by \$145 million by reducing the number of staff and rationalising the available building resources through the quality provision process. Students know what constitutes 'quality' because they are the clients. It is amazing to think that a government advocating the idea that the customer has the greatest impact on quality should exclude the student client, the one involved in the very process of learning, from the decision-making processes.

There are assumptions being made by the government about what students are capable of doing or not doing and it appears to me they are assumptions that never applied to all students. From my experience as a teacher involved in student governance, the students have always proved capable of being discreet, developing the skills and knowledge to make judgements about the use of resources, planning and organising a variety of activities from cross-age tutoring to community services, representing the interests of their constituents, communicating effectively with school administrations and local governments, producing newspapers or running student radio stations, being responsible for their actions, negotiating the curriculum and so on. The list of what students are capable of when given the opportunity is endless. If you give people responsibility, trust and training, they are capable of doing great things.

Perhaps, the time is right for increased student participation. Maybe the language of economic efficiency, productivity and management provides a fertile environment for students to develop greater participation in school matters. Under the SOTF program, which gives greater managerial control to the School Council and Principal, SRCs may become a pressure group suggesting how the school can use its resources. It might be possible for students to participate in the development of curriculum appropriate to the needs of the students, within the boundaries devised by BOS. Of course, for many students this is too optimistic a view.

I feel a great deal of sympathy for students confronted by the prospect of change. I too have my identity and self-esteem tied closely to teaching and the pupils and parents of WSC. At this time, I have no idea what I'll do if confronted by the prospect of a school closure or the prospect of being made redundant.

It is essential that teachers, parents, administrators and the DSE place themselves in the position of students and to realise that there is no greater sense of powerlessness or anger than when you are ignored. The time has come for the decision-makers to humanise their decisions. What do you think?

Allen Jones
Social Education Co-ordinator
Wendouree Secondary College

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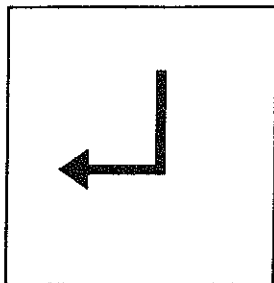
The Courier, Ballarat

VSTA News, Victoria Secondary Teachers Association, Abbotsford

Of course I believe in
democracy, but when
I say 'Go to bed,' I want
you to GO TO BED - and
protest to your M.P.
about it tomorrow...



Opposition about-face on children's rights



When the UN Convention was ratified by the Australian government in 1990 it had the broad support of the Federal Opposition. The Opposition is now blocking a move to add the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the list of international human rights instruments within the jurisdiction of the Federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (HREOC).

Under s47 of HREOC Act 1986, the Minister, after consulting with State and Territory governments, can declare a human rights instrument which Australia has ratified to be an international instrument relating to human rights and freedoms for the purposes of the Act. Only when this has been done does HREOC have statutory powers to inquire into and make recommendations as to action needed to be taken by the Australian government to ensure compliance. Declarations have been made this month in relation to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion and Belief.

The Federal Shadow Attorney-General Daryl Williams QC and Senator Amanda Vanstone moved a Motion of Disallowance which has been set down for debate and vote in early October. The grounds for the Motion are that a reservation should be entered 'acknowledging the pre-eminent role

of the family so that the Convention would be interpreted in a way that safeguarded the primary and inalienable rights of parents'. Any such reservation would make a nonsense of the Convention which requires governments to act in the interests of children, not on the basis of primary and inalienable parents' rights. It seems that the Opposition are being influenced by certain church groups who fear an erosion of parental rights and an undermining of Christian values. One Melbourne lawyer in 1990 described Convention articles as 'a panacea for spoilt brats'. As has been pointed out by many Australian and international experts, the Convention fully acknowledges and affirms the role of parents. But "There is none so blind as those who will not see" and it seems that there is to be another wave of ill-informed opposition to the Convention. It is hard to understand how an international Convention which has attracted ratification by more than two thirds of the member states of the UN can be seen as a subversive document.

NCYLC has written to the Federal Opposition asking members to reconsider their position. It is hoped that those organisations supporting the Convention will express their views to Mr. Williams and other members of the Federal Opposition and also to the Australian Democrats, the Greens WA and the independent member Sen. Harradine. Letters can be sent to: Parliament House, Canberra, ACT 2600 or faxed to (06) 277 2058.

*from Rights Now! - newsletter of the National Children's and Youth Law Centre
Vol 1 No 1, August 1993*

RENEWABLE ENERGY SCIENCE



Students at the Goroke P-12 College have received a grant of \$2000 from the Small Change Foundation to establish a 'Solar Powered Hydroponic Hot House'.

The project is an extension of current curriculum and teaching areas. It crosses the traditional curriculum boundaries of Science, Maths, Technology and Agricultural Studies. The program emphasises links between theory and practice across a number of these curriculum areas.

Equipment currently used in the 'Solar Powered Chook Shed' (Age Curriculum Innovation Award, 1988) has been used in a new context. Hydroponics involves the growing of plants without soil, supplying their nutrients in solution. Students have taken solar panels and a wind generator to power a pump that recirculates nutrient solution. These were previously used to generate power to run incubators and brooding lights for day-old chickens.

The students were asked to produce ideas and plans for the growing of vegetables and flowers out of season. The planning and construction phase included choosing a greenhouse site, pouring a concrete slab, visiting existing flower and vegetable farms, laying out and replasticising the greenhouse, locating and installing solar panels and wind generator on the tower, installing battery packs, wiring solar pumps, and designing and constructing hydroponic frames, rockwool and scoria beds.

Goroke P-12 College (a school of the future) is a small rural school in an isolated location. The involvement of students in new technologies and programs helps to address this isolation, improving students' expectations of themselves and the school. The design and construction phases represent a logical and practical progression into areas of technology that students had learnt about in the classroom. At the completion of the project, students will have constructed, managed, monitored and evaluated an enterprise which incorporates a practical use of renewable energy.

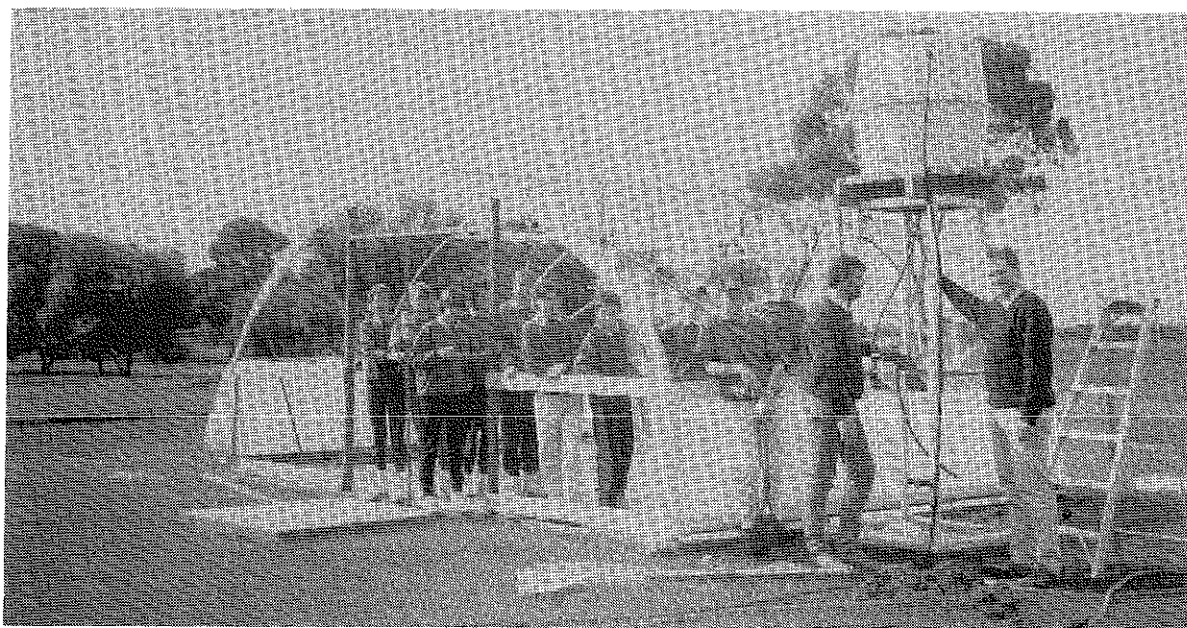
Teachers Rob McLeay and Andrew Vague have overseen the project, which includes students from years 8 to 12. They commented on the benefits of hands-on learning in the science and tech studies areas:

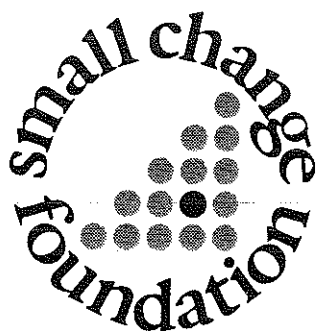
"What better way to complete a unit on plants than to grow them in a system initiated, managed and run by students? How better to illustrate a unit on design and construction than to mark out and pour a slab of concrete and construct a greenhouse? These are things that students remember."

"Teaching from a context is what VCE is all about and is a concept we should use for 7-10 also. The educational outcomes from this project show how our school can provide quality education for students structuring teaching and learning around a practical base."

Andrew Vague

Goroke P-12 College PO Box 132, Goroke 3412





SMALL CHANGE
EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Eumemmerring Secondary College, Victoria

TECHNOLOGY FOR REAL

Girls Construct an Outdoor Seating Area

When I began high school in the 1970s, all students did a term each of Woodwork, Home Economics and Needlework. For most of us girls, Woodwork was a dreary and deflating experience, full of unfamiliar tools, incomprehensible terminology, countless lopsided fruit bowls, and minor yet painful injuries. In year 8, when asked to pick electives, we girls inevitably chose the physically and emotionally safer female-dominated Home Economics.

When I became an Equal Opportunity Coordinator at the Fountain Gate Campus of Eumemmerring Secondary College during 1992, and discovered that we had been the recipient of a Department of School Education Girls In Technology grant, and that the money was sitting waiting for a project to be initiated, I was both challenged and a bit daunted. My own technological education had been somewhat remiss.

After talking around a variety of ideas with the Equal Opportunity Committee and the Technology staff, I submitted an ambitious proposal to the Finance Committee for the money to be released for the girls to design and construct an outdoor covered seating area on the grounds of the school. Our aims were quite simple: to equip girls with a substantial theoretical and practical skill base; to give them a greater understanding of the problem solving and implementation stages involved in technology; to increase their confidence and pride in their ability to achieve in this field; and to utilise their creativity and industry to provide our expanding campus with a much needed facility. We had already been running an after-school Technology activity for girls, and they had expressed enthusiasm for the project.

Bernadette McIvor, one of our Technology teachers, assumed hands-on responsibility for the project in 1993. We publicised the project among the student population and offered it as an option for year 7 and 8 girls in our regular Activities timeslot with Bernadette as supervisor. We arranged for some of

our year 9 girls to join the project later at the construction stage, and have it included as part of their Technology curriculum. The easy part of planning the project was over, and the hard work was about to begin.

The girls began by choosing a site for their seating area and outlining the needs of such a construction - seats and tables were a must; decent shelter from sun, rain and wind was a priority; perhaps a games board and attractive garden environment should be included. Each girl drew a plan and there was a group discussion of the results. Five designs were chosen for further exploration and these were chalked up on the site to test their size and practicality.

With some ideas of their own to keep in mind, the girls' research began in earnest. They examined books, magazines and advertising materials. They watched videos and were visited by a Landscape Architect. They researched plants and found specimens which might be appropriate. With exposure to a whole new range of images and possibilities, the girls returned to the site to contemplate some of its specific implications. It was already nominally built upon, and fencing, existing plants and seating had to be removed. In light of their research, the girls re-examined their five designs and, working in pairs, refined them.

It was around this time that we realised how good the ideas they were coming up with really were, and how this project was growing into a venture much larger than I had first imagined or anticipated. They were creating, designing and going to reconstruct a whole area, not just erect a simple structure. Not despairing, we applied for extra funds to the **Small Change Foundation**, an independent body forging links between schools, individuals, communities and business organisations, with the goal of supporting and promoting public education. We were fortunate enough to receive a grant, and welcome them and Ericsson Telecommunications on board as worthy sponsors.

By this stage, the girls had made rough models of the five remaining plans, and these went on display for everyone's perusal and feedback. The girls invited the Principal to offer her views on the

models, and the group finally settled on the one to be built. Site measurements were taken and a materials list was made. Members of the group read the local papers and wrote letters to associated companies explaining the project and asking for assistance or donations of necessary materials. A scale model was built to put on display for all the school to see. The Australian Institute of Engineers put us in touch with some engineers who offered valuable insights. At the moment, the girls are crafting pickets for the fence, with hearts and shapes and individual logos on them - another way to make their special mark.

It has been a long haul to reach this point. Our official timeslot, without the year 9 girls who will join in shortly, only gives us two periods a week. Now there are materials to be ordered, schedules to be developed and the construction is just on the horizon. I think we have already achieved many of our goals and there have been added bonuses we did not foresee.

Our girls have learnt to speak confidently at assemblies and write business letters and newsletter articles. Their self esteem has been boosted not only through their own achievements but also through the recognition they have received in the form of the grants, a local newspaper article, a visit from an

Ericsson's representative, this commentary and the general interest many people have shown in their project. Their fears no longer centre around "what if it falls down?", but rather "will we have enough time to get it all done?" They are experiencing how Technology as a modern curriculum development is not the same as the old boys-own hammer-first design-second Woodwork I muddled through.

The participation and involvement of the girls in this project, and their growing control over it, has been a key development for us. They believe in the contribution they are making, and in their ability to make it. From Belinda Moore of year 7: "When I started, I didn't think it would work, but now I do."

Given the right opportunity and a supportive environment, girls can enjoy and be successful in Technology. As Megan McGowan of year 7 writes: "When I first started ... it was boring because I didn't know what was going on. Then I got the hang of it ... I think it is a good idea."

And soon they will make it a 'good' reality.

Nicole Muller
Fountain Gate Campus
Eumemmerring Secondary College
PO Box 1232, Narre Warren Exchange 3805



STORYBOOKS WITH A DIFFERENCE

Golden Square Secondary College

Publishing children's storybooks by secondary English students has always been a very successful and enjoyable classroom activity. These books are usually of a high standard and attract a lot of interest.

The project **Storybooks With A Difference** capitalises on this activity and extends it further by including 'signed' English graphically represented for hearing impaired (HI) students - along with the text and illustrations.

The Hearing Impaired Unit for the Loddon Campaspe Mallee Region is in Bendigo, at Golden Square Secondary School (GSSC) and Kennington Primary School. Thus, this project was designed to involve students at both schools.

WHY?

The secondary English students will have a specific audience for their creative writing. The Hearing Impaired students at GSSC will have 'expert' input into the books and the sign language.

The project continues to develop the creative interest of the students. However, possibly for the first time, it will allow the Hearing Impaired students to have an extremely important input into a project in which they are the experts. Similarly, it will give a greater depth of understanding into the complexities of 'signing' and its implications for the hearing students. Of course, the general interaction with primary students in a constructive and friendly manner is another important element of the project.

The primary students will benefit because up until now publishers have virtually ignored the opportunity to use the visual medium of signs represented graphically in books to supplement the written word. This has denied HI children the use of their skills in non-verbal language to assist them in developing their reading abilities. The HI students at Kennington P.S. have limited access to appropriate children's storybooks. This is because:

- they don't have the language ability to read independently
- there are not always 'signing interpreters' available - whether at school or at home - to assist them with their reading.

This activity capitalises on the signing skills of the Hearing Impaired GSSC students and the interest in signing shown by the hearing students. It provides **real** tasks for the secondary students. They have practical and worthwhile applications for their creative writing, artwork, graphics, computer studies and skills in layout.

The senior students will be able to interact with the primary school students - both in seeking their ideas for the stories initially, as well as having immediate feedback when the stories are presented. This active involvement with students of different levels will be enjoyable as well as practical.



HOW?

- secondary students plan and create stories (after draft stage, visit Kennington PS and incorporate students' feedback)
- take photographs, organise artwork for illustrations in books (*the technical expertise of children's author/illustrator Rachel Tonkin was used in a workshop situation)
- organise for graphics of signs for text to be produced, this requires scanning of the Australian Signing Dictionary for accurate reproduction.
- consult HI students at GSSC about the 'signed graphics'
- type stories on word processor and allow for 'signed graphics' to be imported

- print out stories with particular attention to print size, layout and illustrations
- visit Kennington Primary School for presentation and reading of books to students.
- display books in schools and add them to the Primary school's library.

OUTCOMES

The activity is still proceeding and so far has been very positive.

The secondary students working with the Grade 1s was a very enjoyable and fruitful experience.

The workshop provided by the author and illustrator was informative and an area that none of the GSSC students had been involved with before.

At the time of writing the students have their stories on computer disks and are doing illustrations, designing layouts and trying to place the 'signing graphics' below the text in the storybooks.

STUDENT RESPONSES:

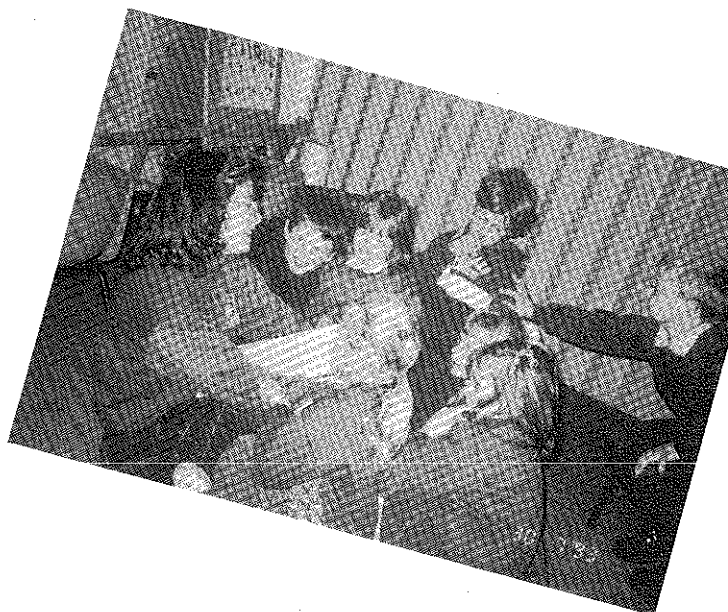
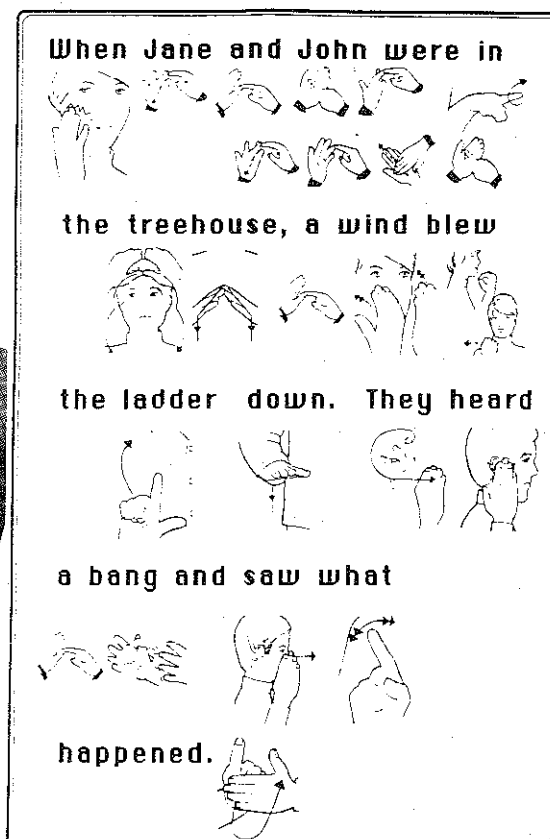
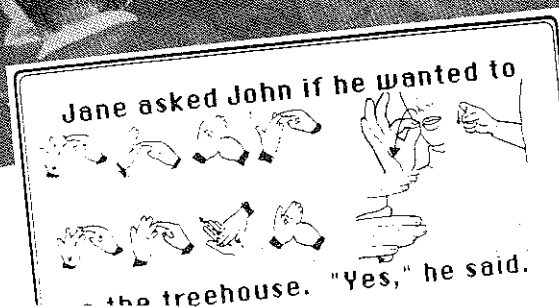
"It has been challenging and well worth it. Working with the little kids was tiring though." Clinton

"Primary kids are loud and they ask a lot of questions. We needed more time for the graphics". Kylie

"It's fun, but time consuming." Michael

"It's good that we're helping the deaf kids." Brad

Angela Molloy
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PO Box 58, Golden Square 3555



Empowering Students to Deal With Harassment

Discussions about harassment at our school began when several people complained about a few students whose anti-social behaviour hurt and put other kids down. The students responsible for this were actually named in the whole school morning meeting and a decision was made to hold a meeting in the Library at lunchtime with the Equal Opportunity person.

Students complained about a number of the named students who had been harassing them and others. They wanted to know why these students behaved the way they did and what, if anything, they could do about it. They decided that the harassers were to be warned. If they continued with their bullying behaviour, they would have to answer for their actions at a special meeting with students and the Equal Opportunity teacher. If they continued with their bullying after that, then they would have to 'front' the whole school at Morning Meeting and explain what their reasons were.

The Equal Opportunity teacher and the students from this first meeting opened a discussion at Morning Meeting concerning what harassment consisted of. The kids decided that if both people were not laughing, then someone is being hurt or hassled by the behaviour. This ranged from derogatory nicknames and sexual innuendo to some physical aggression such as stealing caps.

A video called **There's A Name For It** was shown, which depicted boys harassing girl students, as this was an area of main concern. There was some discussion after the video about a group of boys who followed one girl and called out sexual; derogatory remarks. This left all students in no doubt about what constituted sexual harassment. There was also a follow-up meeting at lunchtime with concerned students and the Equal Opportunity teacher.

Soon after this, several students who had been named in the first meeting continued to harass others verbally. These people were asked by kids and the Equal Opportunity person to attend a small meeting of students who wanted to work this out with the harassers. Two kids at a time were interviewed and 'put in the hot seat'. They were unable to give reasons for their harassing

behaviour. Questions like: "How can we help you?" and "Will it help if we reminded you when you are harassing?" were asked of them.

This non-confrontational strategy helped kids to realise that lots of people didn't like their behaviour, but were still prepared to help them. Thus the offenders knew that people disapproved of their behaviour, not of them.

Follow-up of how these kids were going was monitored at further harassment meetings, and one student who continued to offend was brought before the whole school Morning Meeting.

He was asked why he continued to harass students and behave the way he did. The student was confronted by many people whom he had harassed, and others who had been attending meetings. He was unable to answer for his behaviour and was quite distraught. Finally, a student spoke up for him. She told the others that the student had low self-esteem and was unable to modify his behaviour without help. The student agreed that he needed others' support by their reminding him of his unacceptable behaviour.

This model of using students to confront other students when they harass worked most effectively in reducing harassment around the school. The meetings and focus on kids' behaviour keeps the issue 'alive' in the school community.

When harassment occurs and there hasn't been a meeting for a while, then students request a harassment meeting to be held and facilitated by the Equal Opportunity teacher. Kids need this support when confronting their peers with anti-social behaviour but they own what happens at meetings and feel empowered to protect the victims of harassment by providing a safe place for weaker kids to speak out when they are being bullied or harassed by others.

When the harassment meetings were first called, students were unsure of how to confront offending students but, after a couple of meetings where teachers 'modelled' ways of asking students to 'please explain', kids were able to confront students themselves. It is interesting to note that these meetings did not turn into 'witch hunts' and this was also, at first, monitored by the Equal Opportunity officer, but later this responsibility was accepted by all the students at the meeting.

Harassing students were always more chastened by the criticism and anger of their peers

than by anything the teachers may have said, either from the coordinators or through home-group teachers addressing the same problem. While this model is not perfect and some kids continue to harass, they have modified their behaviour and continue to do so when other kids get sick of it and bring them again before the harassment meetings.

These meetings are held informally at lunchtime and any students who are interested attend. There is always a mixture of people who attend these meetings - boys and girls, people who are harassed and those who don't like seeing people harassed, some teachers and the Equal Opportunity person.

We believe that this model is most effective because all people concerned learn valuable lessons about each other. Students accused of bullying become aware of the effect of their behaviour on others. Victims of harassment learn that the problem, is really the other person's and people who were concerned about harassment learn how to treat both victim and bully with compassion. As teachers, we learnt that the empowerment of students to deal with these kinds of issues is the most valuable means of dealing with harassment!

Birsin Reynolds

Sherbrooke Community School

311 Mt Dandenong Tourist Road, Sassafras 3787

Yesteryear ... well, 1969 to be precise ...

NOTHING TO DO WITH STUDENTS?

The school was in its fourth year. A Student Council had been established in, I think, the second year.

1

One morning, whilst under the shower, the principal had a bright idea. (He always shaved under the shower, so that's where he had most of his 'bright ideas'.) "Why..." he thought, "... why weren't there student representatives present at the weekly staff conference?"

It seemed to him so patently obvious that this was not just a 'good idea' but in fact a '**great idea**', that he was shocked when he saw the hostile reaction by so many of the staff.

"It's taken me so long to gain the confidence to speak in front of my colleagues. I'll be struck dumb again if there are students present!"

After many long, earnest and, quite often, heated discussions, all but three agreed that it was a worthwhile step. The three were adamant in their opposition. The principal said that, as the weekly staff conference was the single most important contributor to the

well-being of the school, he considered that the students should **not** be admitted until there was unanimous agreement. And there the matter rested.

Eventually, the three suggested that they would agree if it were understood that the students could be present on a three-month trial basis. This was done.

At the end of the three months, the principal asked the three teachers how they felt about the experience. "I've got nothing against it going on forever. It just doesn't seem any big deal now. In fact, I can't even remember all the things I had against it!"

2

Later that year, an inspector from the Education Department visited the school and attended a staff conference. The following day he spoke to the principal.

"Is it true that there were three students present at the staff conference I attended?"

(He was very much a conservative, and the principal found his reaction most illuminating.)

"I don't know what shocks me more: the fact that there were students participating equally in a staff conference - or the fact that in the hour and a half I was in attendance, I did not recognise them as such."

3

Were they equal participants?

One night, in the school's sixth year, there was fierce argument amongst staff as to whether table tennis should be allowed to be played in the staff room. After about half an hour, one of the students started to speak, whereupon the senior mistress turned on her with: "This is a staff matter and has nothing to do with students."

The student said very quietly, "In the three years that I have been attending, I have never heard such anger. The existence of such bitter division amongst the staff is very much a matter of concern to students."

It was never again suggested that there was any question that "had nothing to do with students".

David Schapper

Dear Bob; Dear Marylyn

The Spring/Summer 1992 issue of **Hands On**, the teacher network journal of the **Foxfire** Fund, was published in collaboration between the Partnership Teachers Network in Southern Maine, and the **Soundfire** Network in the Puget Sound area of Washington. How do two teacher networks separated by 3000 miles begin such an endeavour? The catalyst was an exchange of letters between **Soundfire** coordinator Bob Jones and the Partnership Teachers' Network coordinator Marylyn Wentworth.

These letters also say extremely important things about the process of reflective writing on our practice.

December 3, 1991

Dear Marylyn,

To get right to the point, I have been really concerned about **Soundfire's** participation in the upcoming issue of *Hands On* we are planning to co-author. Every time I bring up the subject with network members, I seem to hit a brick wall; teachers stare at their feet, no one says a word or makes a comment. Subject closed. So I brought the issue up at our planning committee meeting in early November. No one felt like they could write anything or add to the dialogue by the rough draft due date of February 1 *because no one would be done with their project by then.*

Ouch! It became apparent that we all shared the same basic flaw in our perception about our classroom work. I had this "blinding flash of the obvious" (known in some circles as a BFO). I've seen this phenomenon in Atlanta, East Tennessee, and here in Seattle. I've done it myself. We go step-by-step through our projects like a recipe. And although it's interesting, as a whole we don't necessarily grow from this type of sharing. It's exactly what Joe McDonald addressed in his article "A Messy Business" in *Teacher Magazine* (Nov/Dec, 1991): "There are doubtless many ways to step outside while teaching, but I will recommend three simple ones. First, talk with other teachers about teaching. Share with each other stories that illuminate life inside the triangle. Avoid the well-rounded stories. Instead, share the puzzling ones and puzzle over them together."

The planning committee realised that we needed to address this issue head on at our network meeting on November 16. So I shared basically what I have shared with you so far, but I also gave two examples: 1) Susan Langston's article in *Skyline's Hands On*, in which she writes about the day she felt the power shift in her classroom; and 2) the fact that two of our network members meet once a week to walk around Green Lake and share their "puzzling stories" about

being a **Foxfire** teacher in an alternative high school - and wouldn't that dialogue between two critical friends make an interesting piece? Well, you could see wheels turning and "ahha's" popping throughout the room. The rich dialogue that followed transcended any round-robin sharing by leaps and bounds. Here's a sample of the dialogue:

Gayle: I am really intrigued by the strategies my students are now using to problemsolve, and dealing with group conflicts.

Craig: I have been amazed with the **Foxfire** process in how my students have overcome the stereotypes of one another by working together.

Lynne: I'm just starting, too, and we are not doing a project, but I've been rethinking assessment through the **Foxfire** approach.

Blanche: Don't we need to talk about more than just the good times? What about the dilemma of wasting time?

Gayle: Sometimes I know it is chaos in my classroom and not productive work. How do we deal with the chaos and the guilt?

Joyce: We will never deal with those critical issues if we continue to hide behind the project recipe recitation. It's very easy and safe to run through a project list and never deal with the real stuff that permeates underneath.

It was an invigorating and thought-provoking meeting. The evolution of that dialogue parallels (here we go again!) Joe MacDonald's last two recommendations within his article:

"Second, read teachers' published writing about teaching. Avoid the writing of the curriculum-based journals, the celebratory writing: "How I Solved the Problems of Teaching Quadratic Equations," etc. Go instead for the writing that shows the muck - and the muck clearing. Eliot Wigginton's *Sometimes a Shining Moment*, which captures the real thing even in its title, begins with a paean to muck, and an epigraph from Aunt Addie Norton: *I tell you one thing, if you learn it by yourself, if you have to get down and dig for it, it never leaves you. It stays there as long as you live because you had to dig it out of the mud before you learned what it was.*

"Finally, write about teaching. This is the most important step. I call it 'raising a teacher's voice,' and I think of it as a crucial political act."

We've got a bright beginning here, Marylyn, but we need to do some careful preparation for our January 11 meeting. I would appreciate you and your colleagues' thoughts/ideas about this.

- Bob

December 6, 1991

Dear Bob and Soundfire,

I hear you! We've been talking about our joint *Hands On* with vague commitment and vaguer focus. There are things teachers want to explore and write about, but at the moment all feels like words and not action. I have been running on faith that we will pull things together. Reading the conversation from your November meeting was inspiring. It has the ring of truth. We all grasp at the success stories, but the real work is in the questions, the doubts, and the struggle with change. If our two networks are inside a parent change organisation, then looking at the real issues of change for teachers, students, even parents and network coordinators, seems honest and potentially beneficial for all of us. Posing dilemmas and creating a dialogue from teacher practice feels very exciting. I can even picture a series of letters between teachers on both coasts with the letters becoming published journal talk.

I shall send this double letter to the Partnership Teachers' Network members, and we will talk about it at our December 16 meeting and get back to you. The impetus your letter provides may well spur us on to add to your ideas or expand the ones you offer.

We have one class of journalism students and their teacher David Ruff willing to take on the layout here. Do you have anyone there? Can we link them up so they can decide on things like type, size, how to use PageMaker or what program? How much can be done ahead?

We send our best to all of you on the foggy side of the country from those of us on the frozen side of the country!

- Marylyn

P.S. The conversation you recorded between your *Soundfire* teachers reminds me of the conversation that Ned Hatfield recorded at our November network meeting. Here are some excerpts of our November conversation on this coast. See what you think.

Ramona: When we brainstormed together in Level 1 something finally hit - passion comes out, finally. Can't that work for kids? They finally find something they are passionate about?

Eric: When my kids wrote their ideas and opinions down after a discussion that was stalemated, the written ideas sounded much more similar than the oral statements. It gave us something to go on. Maybe writing would help?

Peter H.: Sometimes there may need to be a tighter focus. There's a real tendency in a democracy, I think, toward fragmentation. Even a cohesive experience in one subject area doesn't seem to transfer to another. School is fragmented all the time in the way learning is presented.

Marylyn: I think it may not even be a problem of decision making or time, but one of concerns for academic integrity coupled with the fragmentation. Peter speaks of, which creates a sense of sense of being stuck.

Barbara: I think stuckness comes before the lightbulb.

Marylyn: Perhaps we need to get kids to our meetings to work through some of this with them.

Eric: For some kids, being empowered is really scary. They are afraid to get wet, to take a chance.

Peter: Barbara's point about the height of frustration we all reach before something works is really an important thing to understand.

Here it was agreed that our collective intelligence was mightier than what any one of us could devise alone, and that kids were a vital part of our collective intelligence. I have faith that this collective intelligence will bring this issue of *Hands On* together - so let's go for it.

- Marylyn



Teaching adolescents rather than subjects

The middle-school years are being seen as a perfect time to teach teenagers key life skills, says **Jim Cumming**.

IMPROVING the quality of learning and teaching for young adolescents is a major item on educational agendas in a number of countries at present. After decades of neglect, many policy makers, administrators, teachers and researchers in Australia are now focusing attention on the education of students in Years 6 to 9.

The Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training issued a report on middle schooling this year. Other reviews were also completed recently in South Australia and the Northern Territory. In the ACT, a review of high schools is maintaining the level of debate.

A view is emerging that the traditional primary-secondary pattern of schooling is no longer in the best interests of most 10 to 15 year olds. Students at the upper end of primary and the lower end of secondary schooling especially, are seen to have a range of needs, interests and concerns that are not always addressed as well as they might be in the context of existing structures and approaches.

Reports in the media, and in research literature, as well as conversations in school staffrooms, are reflecting elements of contemporary dysfunction. At one extreme are headlines trumpeting a growing incidence of violence, binge drinking, eating disorders and attempted suicides among young teenagers.

Less sensational accounts of an 'educational malaise' are also worrying. Teachers and parents use terms such as tuned out, turned-off, disengaged or at worst - totally alienated - to describe the attitude of a significant number of teenagers to their schooling.

Whether these indicators reflect the changing nature of adolescence and life in the 1990s, or constitute significant warning signs that should be heeded as a matter of urgency, is a matter of current debate.

There are some who view these problems as isolated incidents and tend to believe that they can be addressed by modifying or enforcing various rules, regulations and procedures.

Others feel that the indicators are symptoms of more complex problems in our society, and that fundamental reform of contemporary approaches to educating young adolescents is required.

Irrespective of their position, however, most agree that debate about the purposes, goals and intended outcomes of schooling for this age-group is warranted.

In a number of Australian schools teachers, parents, students and community representatives have formed a vision for middle schooling and developed a set of practical strategies directed towards its realisation.

A remarkably consistent view of a 'preferred future' for teenagers is emerging. Heading the list tend to be generic capabilities such as: being a successful learner, having a broad general knowledge and a sense of cultural identity, and having a sense of control over the responsibility for their own lives. 'Successful learners' would be individuals and groups who were able to manage their own learning activities, set realistic goals, and learn from their mistakes.

As many principals, teachers and parents will attest, without a united and consistent effort, such goals and aspirations tend to become rhetorical statements in a policy manual, rather than end-points which govern individual and collective attitudes and behaviour within the school community. All too frequently, pressing demands such as responding to the latest departmental directive, covering course requirements or preparing students for the senior years of schooling, deflect people's attention from the main game.

The emphasis on student learning outcomes is a common feature of many contemporary reports on middle schooling. There is a growing expectation that educators should be much more explicit about what all students need to know, be able to do and be like, as well the criteria and the standards by which their performance will be assessed.

An 'outcome-based' approach to middle schooling in use in parts of the United States is now generating interest here. According to this philosophy, outcomes act as the starting points rather than the end points of learning and teaching.

The curriculum is designed based on outcomes; knowledge is viewed as a means and not an end in itself. It should be emphasised, however, that this does not mean jettisoning content, but rather using it in ways that will challenge, engage and extend all students.

The expectation is that all teenagers will be demonstrating 'fundamental life-role performances' by the end of middle schooling. The focus therefore, is on teaching adolescents rather than subjects. The challenge is one of integrating the development of competencies such as problem solving and decision making with essential knowledge and understandings related to self, family, work and society.

Reports of innovation in middle schooling around Australia are now beginning to be disseminated. The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA), for example, has recently published 24 case studies which reveal a number of school communities implementing more flexible strategies in the form of team teaching, multi-age grouping, sub-schooling and integrated approaches to curriculum.

These and other studies reflect the importance which is being attached to every student succeeding and being able to apply his or her learning in an authentic context - in the home, the community or the world of work - not just the classroom. The practice of Year 9 students working with Year 6 students at local primary schools, for example, on peer-support and tutoring programs, is a case in point.

As part of the renewal of the middle years of schooling, many communities are trying to empower young adolescents by giving them more responsibility for their own learning and development. Traditional forms of active student participation including representative councils, forums, fund-raising activities, social and sporting activities, for example, have been in place in many schools for some time

More powerful forms of student participation, however, are now generating considerable interest. Groups of young adolescents are negotiating aspects of

their curriculum and assessment with teachers, parents and community members in a variety of projects around Australia. Some of these include young adolescents in the researching, writing, illustrating and (sometimes commercial) publication of local histories and biographies or samples of their own writing, art or poetry.

Other students have undertaken community-based projects which have contributed to debate and action at the local level on a range of issues like youth homelessness, care of the environment, and playground facilities for children.

At a national conference on middle schooling held in the US recently, two interesting developments were highlighted and complement innovative developments here in Australia. One was 'student conferencing' in which young adolescents prepare and present 'parent/teacher' nights.

The student takes full responsibility for the meeting; from issuing an invitation to the parents, explaining their intended learning outcomes and how they intend to reach them, to providing their own and peer assessments of their progress to date. The teacher assumes the role of facilitator and observer and also provides an assessment at the conference.

The other development was the infusion of a 'total quality' approach to middleschooling. In the US, considerable effort in a number of schools is being directed towards establishing and maintaining a learning culture which is steeped in cooperative approaches, continuous improvement and high-level outcomes.

In some US schools, students are constructing their own criteria by which they assess the quality of their own and their peers' outcomes. This emphasis on cooperative assessment is helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses.

The recommendation in the EPAC report *Education and Training in the 1990s*, released recently, that "education reform should now be directed to primary and secondary schooling" is timely. It lends weight to the view that it is more cost-effective to allocate additional resources or to reallocate existing ones - to improve the quality of the middle years of schooling.

If high-quality middle schooling is to be achieved, community involvement will be necessary. New coalitions, alliances and partnerships involving students, teachers, parents, local government, business, industry and interest groups will need to be negotiated with a view to expanding the range of learning opportunities for all adolescents. As Merv Edmunds, a Victorian teacher argues, "kids do remarkable things when they have remarkable things to do".

Jim Cumming is executive director of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

This article first appeared in The Canberra Times, Wednesday, August 11, 1993



NEWS AND REVIEWS

Theory and Practice of REGRESSIVE EDUCATION

"In the UK and the USA, there has been a sustained attack, for about 20 years, on something labelled 'progressive education'. The attack was, at first, tentative, then more confident, and then strident. In the UK 1988 Education Act and the various subsequent revisions, the attackers claimed victory. Yet the obscurity of the target makes the claim difficult to evaluate. There are two immediate problems. The first is what is meant by progressive education, and the second, what is the nature of what is supposed to replace it - that is so superior. **The opposite of progressive is regressive.**

"So the mystery investigated in this book, by Professor Roland Meighan (with contributions by Professor Sir Hermann Bondi, Martin Coles, Professor Philip Gammage and Janet Meighan), is: **what is the nature of regressive education?**

"The book shows how regressive education, as applied in compulsory schooling in particular, favours:

- tightly controlled learning rather than eclectic and spontaneous enquiry;
- a set curriculum imposed by adults rather than self-directed curriculum;
- the view that 'Life is no picnic, so school should be no picnic' - be fatalistic and endure it by getting toughened up;

- teaching being defined as formal instruction and authoritarian control;
- the idea that learning to work without pleasure in school is a necessary pre-requisite to coping with the pain, frustration and dullness of employment - that is, if you get any.

"One feature of the return of more regressive schooling has been the emphasis on subjects and the imposition of these on younger and younger children. Yet subjects have only a modest part to play in the scheme of things: they are only part, and a diminishing part at best, of the tool kit of knowledge. It may be that subject teachers have little or no future in education because all they know can be readily made available in books, interactive videos, computer programs and distance teaching materials.

"The conclusion is that the switch to regressive ideas in any schooling system is no more than an attempt to refine ancient machinery to try to make it more efficient in the pursuit of obsolete goals."

Theory and Practice of Regressive Education (ISBN 0 9518022 3 2), 1993

Educational Heretics Press, 113 Arundel Drive, Bramcote Hills, Nottingham NG9 3FQ UK

Young People in Action

Youth Advocacy in Action Kit

What is Youth Advocacy? There's a new kit available from Victoria that deals with this issue, and which provides practical information and advice about youth advocacy approaches and the development of young people's groups.

This kit aims to

- provide young people with examples of youth advocacy in action;
- assist young people to start running their own projects;
- inform workers with young people about the ways some young people have organised their own projects, and the challenges associated with assisting Youth Advocacy in Action.

Young People in Action is in three parts, collected in an attractive folder.

Part 1 deals with 'What is Youth Advocacy?'; Part 2 provides basic information

about 'Getting Started'; Part 3 outlines five 'Groups in Action' and provides more details about groups introduced in Part 2. In addition, the folder includes Background Papers - a series of articles that helped form the basis of the rest of the kit.

The **Youth Advocacy in Action Kit** is auspiced by the Victorian Youth Advocacy Network and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. It is free to young people, and costs \$15 for others. Copies can be obtained by contacting either of the above organisations:

Victorian Youth Advocacy Network,
1st Floor, 113 Queens Parade, Clifton Hill 3068.
Phone: (03) 481 1488;

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria,
Suite 1, 250 Gore Street, Fitzroy 3065.
Phone: (03) 419 9122.

THE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION HANDBOOK

Macmillan Publishing Company and the Solomon Press in the USA are currently producing a comprehensive directory of educational alternatives. Though US-based, it is hoped that this can also be an international Directory. The book will enable students, parents counsellors, teachers and administrators to know about approximately five thousand educational alternatives. It will also contain essays by some major educators and writers in this field.

Schools and groups can be listed in the Directory at no cost.

Connect can provide you with their information sheet/questionnaire if you are interested to be included.

Phone us on (03) 489 9052 or 344 8573 and we'll send you a copy.

But HURRY - the request asked for responses by early October, but I suspect that late entries may be possible.

Or contact Jerry Mintz directly at 417 Roslyn Road, Roslyn Heights, New York 11577. Phone: (516) 621 2195; fax: (516) 625 3257.

REQUEST

Through US listings, **Connect** frequently receives information and requests related to Australian alternative schools. Some we can deal with directly; others we pass on through these columns:

"I am writing to inquire about teaching positions at Australian Alternative Schools. I am certified to teach Art, Kindergarten through High School, in the US, and am very interested in the possibility of teaching in Australia.

"Presently I am living and working in the US (Bloomington, Indiana) but would very much like to have an opportunity to teach in Australia.

"I am a fluent speaker of Portuguese and have a good understanding of Spanish.

"I would like to be involved in Art Education. I enjoy teaching/learning and being around young people. I take art very seriously and see it as an important and influential force. For this reason I am also interested in the field of Art Education itself: why people make art and how they learn to make art. In the future I would like to continue pursuing this interest."

Luzia Martins
339 S Lincoln Street #F
Bloomington IN 47401 USA

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN EDUCATION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees every child an education. Australia, having ratified that Convention, is under an obligation to promote the principles of the Convention.

In an attempt to promote these rights, the National Children's and Youth Law Centre is undertaking a special "Children's Rights in Education" Project, which will look at various issues relevant to children.

Janina Jancu, a solicitor from Blake Dawson Waldron on secondment, is running the project and will be putting together a 'kit' of Information Sheets dealing with issues such as school uniform, searches and confiscations, expulsion and suspension, and bullying.

These kits will be offered to all school libraries, youth groups etc, to provide children with a better understanding of their rights and how to assert them.

National Children's and Youth Law Centre,
Level 4, 173 Philip Street, Sydney 2000 NSW.
Telephone: (02) 221 4361; Fax: (02) 221 4403.

LIFE RIGHTS EDUCATION KIT

The Life Rights Education Kit is a curriculum 'package' that provides information and approaches for teaching and learning about people's rights in a wide range of areas. It is produced particularly for use by year 9 and 10 students.

The kit, auspiced by the Victorian Youth Advocacy Network, with funding from the Legal Aid Commission of Victoria, is moving towards its final production and distribution.

For more details, contact the Network on (03) 481 1488.

ENTERPRISE

I am keen to develop a cooperative enterprise model for schools, sponsored by the Credit Cooperatives.

Do you know of any models in this area?

Paul Kearney
Enterprise Design Associates
19 Pitt Street, North Hobart TAS 7000
Telephone: (002) 34 6002; Fax: (002) 34 2017

**CONNECT WELCOMES YOUR LETTERS AND ARTICLES
USE THE COLUMNS OF CONNECT TO SEEK INFORMATION AND FEEDBACK
CORRESPOND DIRECTLY WITH CONNECT CONTRIBUTORS**

CLEARINGHOUSE

Local and Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can't lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on (03) 489 9052 or (03) 344 8573:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Koori Newsletter (Shepparton South SC, Vic)
July, August/September 1993
Get Knitted (YWCA, Vic) No 5, August 1993

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:

Foxfire (Mountain City, Georgia, USA) Vol 26
No 3/4 (#101/2) Fall-Winter 1992

OTHER PUBLICATIONS:

Australian:

Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT)
September 1993

Network News (Surry Hills, NSW) Sept 1993

Rights Now! (National Children's and Youth
Law Centre, Sydney) Vol 1 No 1, Aug 1993

Curriculum Perspectives (ACSA, Belconnen,
ACT) Vol 13 No 3 September 1993

Youth Wages Literature Search (Australian
Youth Foundation, Inc, Sydney) 1993

Let's Live (National Youth Foundation,
Darlinghurst, NSW) Vol 1 No 2 July 1993

**1992 Annual Report and 1993 Grants
Awards** (Small Change Education
Foundation, Vic)

**Young People in Action: Youth Advocacy
in Action Kit** (Victorian Youth Advocacy
Network and Youth Affairs Council of
Victoria) kit, October 1993

**A Focus on Alcohol and Services and Early
School Leavers** (Youth Research Centre,
Vic) - Research Report 10, Working Paper 10.

Overseas:

Natural Life (Ontario, Canada) Vol 18 No 30,
April/May 1993

Communication Research Trends (St Louis,
Missouri, USA) Vol 13, Nos 3 and 4; 1992-3

Foundation Update (ANPA, USA) Vol 19 No
2, Summer 1993

Hands On (Foxfire Fund, Georgia, USA) Issue
43-44, Spring-Summer 1992

**Theory and Practice of Regressive
Education**, Roland Meighan, Educational
Heretics Press (UK)

Articles:

The articles listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of **Connect**. However they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A fuller list is available in **Connect** 46/47 - to October 1987. We are currently working on a database that will enable these articles to be accessed by subject, key-word etc.)

Code Description/Pages/Cost

395 "The Risks of Whole Language Literacy: Alienation and Connection", Susan Harman and Carole Edelsky in **Language Arts**, Vol 66, No 4, April 1989

(7 pp; \$1.00)

396 "Teachers and Teaching: Beyond the Classroom", Carol Stumbo in **Harvard Educational Review**, Vol 59, No 1, February 1989

(6 pp; \$1.00)

397 "What Does an SRC Do?" **Report of a forum for students who are members of SRCs**, Inner Western School Support Centre (Vic), 26/7/93

(15 pp; \$1.50)

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- Back issues of **CONNECT** (\$4 single; \$6 double issue). Circle issue/s required: \$

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- **Students and Work** - 1985 **Connect** reprint booklet #5 (\$5) \$
- 'Youth Radio' issue of 3CR's **CRAM Guide** (1985) (\$1) \$
- **Radio Times** - Broadcasting Handbook (\$3) \$

- **Sometimes a Shining Moment** (Wigginton) (\$25) \$
- **Foxfire 9** (Doubleday Anchor) (\$25) \$
- **Foxfire: 25 Years** (Doubleday) (\$25) \$
- **A Foxfire Christmas** (Doubleday hardcover) (\$25) \$
- **Shining Moments** - *Foxfire* video (1 hour) (loan for 1 week: \$5) \$

- **SRC Pamphlets Set** (6 pamphlets; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria) (\$5) \$

- **Photocopies** of the following articles:

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- **Index to articles** available (database currently being computerised) (\$3) \$

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